

What is claimed is:

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1. A collaborative information system comprising a metadata-enhanced database (metabase) for recording data and related metadata and for enabling a metabase user to assess the reliability of the data and other metabase users based upon the metadata.
 2. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the reliability of the data is assessed by evaluating the reliability of its contributors and the reliability of the contributors is assessed by evaluating the reliability of the data.
 3. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the metabase is populated and maintained by the metabase users.
 4. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the metabase comprises automated versioning means for tracking and maintaining a history of each datum recorded in the metabase.
 5. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the metabase comprises notification means for notifying interested metabase users regarding metabase changes.
 6. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the metabase comprises information gathering means for obtaining information from various sources.
 7. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the metabase comprises reliability assessment means for assessing the reliability of the data and the metabase users.
 8. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the metabase comprises automated help means for resolving metabase user queries.

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9. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the metabase comprises customizable retrieval means for enabling a metabase user to specify various criteria for retrieving data.

10. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the metadata comprises at least one of:

- user identification information;
- user personal information;
- user performance information;
- information characterization information;
- contributor information;
- source (citation) information;
- feedback information;
- implicit information;
- historical information;
- user rankings obtained from one or more ranking authorities;
- opinion information from contributors and users of the data regarding the reliability of the data and the users; and
- solicited information regarding the reliability of the data and the users.

11. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the metabase comprises browser means for interacting with web-based entities.

12. The collaborative information system of claim 1, wherein the metabase uses an editable data markup language for creating and using the metabase, wherein the editable data markup language comprises:

- means for defining a metabase structure;
- means for editing the metabase structure;

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means for contributing information to metabase structure;
means for retrieving information from the metabase structure;
means for combining data from multiple metabases; and
means for automatically updating one metabase from another metabase.

13. A ranking authority for generating a user ranking based upon user contributions to a metadata-enhanced database, the ranking authority comprising:

means for evaluating the reliability of a user based upon metadata relating to the user's contributions to a metadata-enhanced database; and

means for generating a user ranking representing the reliability of the user; and

means for updating the user ranking based upon additional metadata.

14. A metadata-enhanced robot for linking to a metadata-enhanced database, the metadata-enhanced robot comprising means for retrieving information from the metadata-enhanced database.

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